

Language acquisition and psychosocial adaptation in adult refugees living in Norway

A qualitative study

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the process of second language learning and psychosocial adaptation in a group of 11 adult refugees living in Norway. The research investigated aspects influencing the learning process and how Norwegian proficiency affects refugees' adjustment and psychological well-being. Qualitative methods, consisting of participant observation and semi-structured interviews, were employed to collect the data. Data were analyzed by using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach. Proficiency in Norwegian appears as a central resource with regard to several domains, such as: employment, maintaining family well-being and engaging in social relationships. Gaining Norwegian fluency would provide refugees with the skills required for engaging in meaningful activities and would prevent negative psychological consequences provoked by isolation or lack of employment. The results indicate that age at migration and educational backgrounds have an important influence on language learning and subsequent language proficiency. These aspects should be understood in relation to post-migration aspects, such as personal investment, attitudes towards Norway and native Norwegians, and features related to Norwegian language usage in different social situations. The findings also illustrate that participation to Norwegian classes is decisive for learning the language. Several aspects of the classroom context- like group cohesion; class size; methods employed and teacher- student relations affected how students engaged in and benefited from the language classes. We argue that a broader perspective- including individual and contextual aspects- is requested in order to understand refugees' experiences of second language acquisition and adaptation.

INTRODUCTION

Migration creates challenges for refugees and receiving societies. Language is one of the most potent of these challenges. Lack of language fluency compromises economic opportunity, and access to social resources. At a more personal level, linguistic competence helps ensure well-being by avoiding intra- familial disruptions that can be brought about by children learning a new language more quickly than the parents, and by preventing isolation. From a receiving society's point of view, lack of languages erodes human capital, and increases the cost of providing services. Understanding the factors that contribute to language acquisition, which in turn, contributes to successful integration, is particularly important (Hou & Beiser, 2006).

Not much research to date has focused on the ways in which adult refugees go about the task of mastering new languages, or on the relationship between proficiency in a second language and refugees' well- being (Hou & Beiser, 2006). The present study addresses these neglected topics and offers a comprehensive description of personal and situational aspects that influence second language acquisition- inside and outside the language classes context- and describes how language fluency affects the process of adjustment and refugees' psychological well- being. The readings for this study are informed by a range of psychosocial theories of second language learning/ acquisition and theories regarding refugees' adjustment and psychological well- being. As Goodkind (2006) mentions, it is important to consider refugees' well being from a holistic perspective that recognizes both previous experiences and challenges which refugees face in their daily lives in the new environment. Accordingly, the present study takes into consideration Norwegian resettlement policies, and the degree to which these respond to the participants' needs.

Background for the study

Breakdowns in civil order have led to increasingly large- scale population displacements in the past thirty years (Allen, Vaage & Hauff, 2006). In 2006, 9.9 million refugees were reported globally, being the highest number registered in the last five years (The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2007). At the beginning of January 2007, Norway's refugee population counted 125.100 people, which represents 2.7 percent of the entire Norwegian

population and nearly double as much as in 1997. The largest increase is to be found among refugees from Iraq (13 900), Somalia (10 100), and Afghanistan (6 000) (Statistics Norway, 2007).

Refugees are defined as people leaving their own country of origin because of “*well founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion*” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2007). As a group, they have survived trauma or violence related to war or political oppression in their country. They frequently do not want to leave their homes, and if they do, refugees have to go through a long and stressful process of adapting to the new society, that includes learning the language and finding jobs (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 2002; Berry, Segall & Kagitçibasi, 1997).

In the Nordic states immigrant incorporation has been highly regulated through the formation of integrationist policies and welfare schemes. ‘Integration’ has constituted the key concept that central authorities and the public repeatedly have referred to. One of the clearest affirmations of this approach is the so- called Introductory Programme (Nygård, 2006). The programme is based on the Introduction Law, operative in September 2004, basically stating that all recognized refugees have the ‘right and duty’ to attend to a two year full- day education and training programme (Integrerings og Mangfoldsdirektoratet, 2004). The system is intended to help newly arrived refugees, between 18 and 55, to integrate faster and more easily, which is to be achieved through education in basic skills. The program includes Norwegian language training, language and working practice, and education in Norwegian society. Every person taking part in the project works out an individual plan, setting out how the program is to be accomplished and receives a personal follow up. The weekly participation is equivalent to a normal Norwegian working week of 37,5 hours. A benefit of approximately 125,000 Norwegian crowns will be paid to all participants (European Association for the Education of Adults, 2006). The program has had about 10,000 participants during the last two years. The responsible department, the Directorate of the Integration and Diversity (IMDi), states that 53% of the participants are in work or training by the end of the introductory programme (IMDi, 2007).

Some participants in the Introductory Programme- often adult persons with limited educational background- do not achieve practical use of this offer, due to low progression in learning Norwegian. S. project was launched by M. center in Bærum- a district in the east of Norway- in collaboration with the Refugee Office in Bærum (Flyktningskontoret, Bærum), and Bærum Center for Adult Education (BKVO) in order to meet these participants' needs. The project is sponsored by IMDi, and has the purpose to increase participants' benefit of the Introductory Programme by employing new approaches and methods that facilitate effective and motivating teaching. The project started in august 2006, and is ongoing. S. project makes use of participatory learning approaches, which are considered to better meet these participants' needs than ordinary language classes. The project offers training in Norwegian language, and language and work practice (Grung, 2006).

Conceptualization of second language learning

Scholars within socio- cultural and socio- linguistic perspectives envision language learning in essentially social terms. In this context, language learners are viewed as social beings, and researchers are concerned with their relationships to the social context in which the language learning takes place (Block, 2003; Lantolf, 2000, 2006; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Some second language researchers have proposed a principled distinction between formal, conscious *learning*, and informal, unconscious *acquisition* (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). This study will use the two terms interchangeably.

Research following the socio- cultural perspective has mainly been concerned with second language learning in the classroom context. However, during the last decades the naturalistic context of second language acquisition has gained a more central role in the theoretical and empirical literature (Block, 2003). The same author argues that this is of particular importance for the process of second language acquisition for the millions of refugees and immigrants around the world, who find themselves absorbed in a new language context and simply must go on with their life.

An early second language acquisition documentation of learners in such contexts is Schumann's study of Alberto, and the 'acculturation model' he developed based on this study (Block, 2003;

Mitchell & Myles, 2004; McLaughlin, 1987). The ‘acculturation model’ sustains that the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target- language group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language. In this view, acculturation- and hence second language acquisition is determined by the degree of social and psychological ‘distance’ between the learner and the target- language culture (McLaughlin, 1987).

Later psychosocial models of second language acquisition have been Gardner’s socioeducational model (Gardner, 1983, 2000) and Clément’s social context model (Clément, Baker & MacIntyre, 2003). Gardner (1983) makes the distinction between two classes of attitudes, integrativeness- that refers to positive affect towards the other language community- and attitudes towards the learning situation- seen as evaluative reactions. The model proposes that integrativeness and attitudes toward the learning situation are two correlated variables that support the individual’s motivation to learn a second language, but that motivation is responsible for achievement in the second language (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Clément’s social context model proposes that frequent and pleasant contact with the second language group will ultimately lead to variations in second language confidence. Second language confidence, composed of perceptions of communicative competence and low levels of second language anxiety is, in turn, associated with increased communication competence in the second language, increased identification with the second language group, and increased psychological adaptation (Clément et al., 2003).

Conceptualization of psychological adaptation among refugees

Migrant adaptation refers to the process through which persons reorganize or rebuild their lives after relocating to a new socio- cultural context (Ryan, Dooley & Benson, 2008). Research on adjustment has differentiated between psychological and socio- cultural adjustment (Ward, 2001). The former refers to psychological well- being or satisfaction, the later is related to the ability to ‘fit in’, to acquire culturally appropriate skills and to negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment. Psychological adjustment can be understood in terms of a stress and coping framework while socio- cultural adaptation is best explained within a social skills or culture learning paradigm (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). However, the two domains are complementary, and the relationship between them is stronger for those adopting integrationist and assimilationist strategies of acculturation compared to the separated and marginalized (Ward, 2001).

The culture learning approach deals with the behavioral aspects of culture contact and concentrate on the processes by which newcomers acquire culturally relevant skills to survive and prosper in their new environments. The approach suggests that language skills are important for socio- cultural adaptation, as they represent tangible resources that facilitate skills acquisition in a new cultural milieu (Masgoret & Ward, 2006; Ward, 2001).

Some argue that the empirical and theoretical literature on migrants' adjustment is rather fragmented and disjointed (Ryan et al., 2008; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). To achieve a more holistic view on the life experiences of refugees, Ryan et al. (2008) propose a conceptual framework, which is based on the concept of resources. They argue that a key objective of research on migrant adaptation must be to identify groups who experience the most difficulty in gaining resources central for their adaptation (such as language proficiency). The model draws and builds upon Berry's acculturation framework, Hofboll's 'conservation of resources' theory, and Lazarus and Folkman's work on 'stress and coping'. The authors use the term *migrant* adaptation to describe the process in which individuals seek to satisfy their needs, pursue their goals and manage demands encountered after relocating to a new society. This concept is preferred to that of *cross- cultural* adaptation because it encompasses the whole range of demands faced by individuals, not only those rooted in contact with a new culture.

Migration invariably has an impact on individuals' resource pool. The study of migrant adaptation is fundamentally an examination of factors that facilitate or constrain access to resources. Resources can be defined as the means by which individuals satisfy needs, pursue goals and manage demands, and can be grouped under four categories: personal, material, social, and cultural (Ryan et al., 2008). Hobfoll (2001) asserts that resources tend to aggregate in caravans, and that one key resource is often linked to other resources. Migrants with a greater resource pool or one that contains key resources (such as host language proficiency) are in a stronger position to adapt to their new environment from the outset. The nature and level of these resources must be understood in the context of the individual needs, goals and demands that they encounter. An analysis of the psychological adaptation of refugees needs to take into account experiences from the pre- migration, flight and post- migration temporal phases. Moreover,

resources are in a constant state of flux. The pre- migration and flight phases will primarily be characterized by resource loss, especially in terms of personal, material and social resources. The mere act of entering a new sociocultural environment means that the migrant will almost inevitably experience the loss or devaluating of some cultural resources, such as social status, education, occupational skills and experience. Furthermore, the authorities of the host society may place constraints on access to key resources, such as employment or education (Ryan et al., 2008).

Negative psychological outcomes are likely to arise when the host environment places constraints on or depletes the migrants' existing resources, while offering few opportunities for resource gain. Psychological suffering will result in cases of unmet needs, the loss or blocking of goals and exposure to an unmanageable level of demands. If the individual has the possibility to satisfy basic needs, pursue valued goals and manage demands effectively, then he or she is likely to enjoy psychological well- being (Ryan et al., 2008).

Ryan et al. (2008) argue that the 'resources- based' model is valuable in terms of guiding in-depth interviews with resettled refugees. The approach can allow for greater cultural sensitivity than using standardized Western instruments in that the respondents themselves can describe, for example, what they perceive to be their needs and goals, and the resources needed to attain them.

Previous research

Previous studies have investigated the role played by language skills in migrants' socio- cultural and psychological adaptation, as well as the aspects influencing language acquisition- inside and outside the classroom context. This section contains a short presentation of some of these studies and of their findings.

Language fluency and adjustment

Language fluency has been studied in relation to socio- cultural adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1993a), employment and depressive disorders (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Hayfron, 2001), and feelings of belonging to the new environment (Grønseth, 2001, 2006; Keyes & Kane, 2004). Further,

research has showed that language fluency affects relationships within the family (Ng, 2007; Segal & Mayadas, 2005).

Ward and colleagues have developed the concept of socio- cultural adaptation, which refers to the ability to fit in or negotiate effective interactions in a new cultural milieu (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). Studies conducted with students have found that language fluency bears a straightforward relationship to social adjustment. Regression analysis reveals that language fluency is associated with increased interaction with members of the host culture and a decrease in socio- cultural adjustment problems (Ward & Kennedy, 1993a).

Language proficiency was also studied in relation to employment and depressive disorders. Beiser and Hou (2001) conducted a study with refugees living in Canada and found that by the end of the first decade in Canada, English fluency was a significant predictor of depression and unemployment. Similarly, Hayfron (2001) reported that language proficiency was a decisive factor for immigrants to get a job in the Norwegian labor market.

More qualitative oriented research has linked language fluency to feelings of ‘belonging’ to the new environment. Keyes and Kane (2004) for example, found that belonging emerged as a major theme in the discourses of seven female Bosnian refugees living in the United States. These refugees described their language proficiency as a means of deeper connection and understanding among the natives in their new homes, as well as restoring a sense of normality in their lives. In two studies conducted in Norway with Tamil refugees, Grønseth (2001, 2006) presented refugees’ experiences of loss as they were searching for a sense of belonging to the community, but felt marginalized and stigmatized. As a response, the refugees did not attend Norwegian language classes offered by the community and ten years after their arrival in Norway only few of them were able to communicate with much fluency in Norwegian. In this way, they expressed their lack of interest to engage in any kind of social relationships with the Norwegian community, as they did not feel to belong in Norway.

Results from several studies indicate that living in family units could function as a significant resource. Intrafamilial distress can affect the psychological well- being of individuals (Ward at

al., 2001). Ward and colleagues (2001) sustained that proficiency in the host country's language affects relationships inside newcomers' families- particularly between parents and children- and might lead to family disruption. Ng (2007) debated issues of language acculturation and communication acculturation and illustrated how migrant parents experienced difficulties in engaging in meaningful collaborative talk with their children, due to language mismatch. In another study, Segal and Mayadas (2005) found that traditional familial roles and responsibilities in immigrant and refugee families are frequently challenged, exacerbated by socio- cultural differences and inadequate understandings between the new arrivals and the host country.

Determinants of second language learning

Second language learners engage in and approach learning tasks differently, depending on personal motives, goals, and socio- cultural histories (McCafferty, Roebuck & Wayland, 2001; Roebuck, 2000). Moreover, attitudes towards the host country and host co nationals influence newcomers' motivation to acquire a second language and subsequent proficiency (Gardner, 2000; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Clément, Baker, and MacIntyre (2003) found that frequency and quality of contact with the second language group were intercorrelated, and both predicted second language confidence. Second language confidence was related to willingness to communicate in the second language and predicted frequency of second language use. Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994), demonstrated that classroom activities and extracurricular contact activities jointly affect language self- confidence. The results from this study showed that good classroom atmosphere promotes student involvement and activity, while moderating anxiety and promoting self- confidence. Moreover, being active in the class meant the students believed they were able to use English outside the classroom. Based on their study with students, Platt and Brocks (2002) argued that 'task engagement' must take place, if learners were to move from 'mere compliance' to take control of given classroom tasks, make maximum use of the second language, and create the most favorable conditions for language learning.

Determinants of second language learning among adult refugees and immigrants

While findings from the above mentioned studies could be applied to refugees, additional aspects need to be considered. Pre- migration experiences (Porter & Haslam, 2001; Everly & Lating, 2004, in Allen et al., 2006), age at migration (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Hou & Beiser, 2006), and

previous educational background (Elmeroth, 2003) have been depicted as aspects that affect language acquisition among refugees. Moreover, post- migration features, such as personal investment (Mesch, 2003), and language use (Chiswick & Miller, 2001; Dustmann & Fabri, 2003) might also affect newcomers' second language proficiency.

Pre- migration aspects usually refer to age of migration, and level of formal education, although the relation between age of migration and language acquisition is still unclear. The literature suggests that young immigrants learn new languages more easily than the older ones (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Hou & Beiser, 2006; Mesch, 2003). One explanation is that youth confers biological advantage. Learning a new language is a task that request short- term memory, a skill that declines with age. Other explanations for age- related differences in language acquisition involve differential exposure to circumstances for language practice, and learning (Hou & Beiser, 2006). The resettlement context offers more incentive to youth to learn and to use the language. Majority culture schools provide children and youth a routine and extensive exposure to the dominant language for which the adult experience provides no equivalent (Chiswick & Miller, 2001; Dustmann & Fabri, 2003; Hou & Beiser, 2006).

Several refugees simultaneously may cope with the consequences of traumatic experiences as they undergo contact and learn a second culture. Characteristics of the response to trauma can include PTSD, depression, and anxiety. These responses can impede exploratory behavior, along with attention, concentration, and other cognitive processes important in both motivation and learning ability (Everly & Lating, 2004, in Allen et al., 2006). There is evidence that past traumatic experiences and staying in refugee camps has greater negative consequences for psychological well- being and can act as barriers to the acquisition of the host language (Porter & Haslam, 2001; Ward, 2002).

Learning a second language requires continuing effort and devotion (Hou & Beiser, 2006), both in terms of attending official education and of the time one invests in studying alone. Personal investment in learning has been viewed as a determinant of language acquisition. Norton Peirce (1995) argues for the conception of 'investment' rather than 'motivation' to capture the complex relationship of language learners to the target language. She argues that

learners will expect or hope to have a good return on investment- a return that will give them access to previously unattainable resources. This investment return will then motivate the learner to reinvest effort in the learning process. Similarly, Mesch (2003) illustrates that factors prior to migration, such as proactive motivation for migration, and the social reactions of the local society to immigrant influence immigrants' commitment to remaining in the host country. Furthermore, commitment to remaining in a resettlement country reinforces willingness to invest efforts in language training.

Finally, research has also investigated language learning among refugees inside the classroom context. Baynham (2006) used narratives and case studies to analyze the construction of classroom discourse in 'adult English for speakers of other languages classes for refugees and asylum seekers'. The classroom is described as a site of dynamic pushes and pulls; with teacher and student agendas shaping interaction and claiming place. The author emphasizes the relevance of this open-ended classroom environment, which provides opportunities for students to develop strategies for claiming space in ongoing talk. It also brings into the curriculum precisely those challenging encounters, which have the potential to block their life chances.

Aim of the study

A key objective of research on migrant adaptation must be to identify groups who experience the most difficulty in gaining resources or even in conserving those they already have (Ryan et al., 2008). Holistic interventions that address material, social and educational needs and the challenges of living in a new country, as well as psychological needs, are important. This requires creative approaches and broader definitions of the appropriate roles for psychologists and other people to seek to promote the mental health and well being of refugees (Goodkind, 2006).

Studies on language learning among adult refugees are rare, and often conducted from a quantitative perspective. Tracing the process of language acquisition during the early years of resettlement is particularly important. Previous investigations have suggested that the first few years in a new country may be the most critical for learning its language. After this period the odds that persons who have not acquired the host country language will eventually do so become increasingly remote (Hou & Beiser, 2006).

The purpose of the present research is to offer insights into the process of second language learning among a group of adult refugees living in Norway. The study has the following research questions: How does Norwegian skills influence refugees' adjustment and psychological well-being.; Which aspects prior to and post- migration influence the language acquisition process.; Which features of the classroom context respond best to refugees' needs and how do they influence subsequent language acquisition.

METHOD

Preparatory and ethical concerns

The aim of the present study was to extend knowledge about a particular phenomenon from the perspective of the persons experiencing it. The research focused upon second language learning from an 'inside' perspective, and previous studies employing this perspective are rare. The author found no similar study conducted in Norway, or elsewhere, published in the literature.

Conducting research with refugees may be a sensitive matter, since many may have experiences that are burdening and thus indicate the need to use special approaches. Therefore, several concerns emerged in the beginning of this study, regarding research design and implementation.

In order to meet these concerns, a qualitative, phenomenological approach seemed suitable (Camic, Rhodes & Yardley, 2003; Titchen & Hobson, 2005). The present study made use of an open and inductive approach- in form of participant observation and semi- structured interviews. The intention was both to attend to the participants' perspectives, meanings and needs, and to provide consistent and reliable data that may serve as a base for further theoretical and empirical studies on the present research topic.

One practical concern was related to the fact that the participants' Norwegian was relatively poor, and it made it impracticable- for the majority of participants- to conduct the interviews in this language. Given the essentially linguistic nature of qualitative research, where a concordance of language between researcher and participant might be seen as a prerequisite, this mismatch of languages was problematic (Smith, 2004). Therefore, eight interviews were conducted with interpreters, and one interview was conducted in English.

Pettersen and Jareg (2006, in Dahl, Sveaass & Varvin) discussed the importance of ensuring a high quality of the translation. This quality was secured by using qualified translators, which worked for the Refugee Office in Bærum, and had a long experience in working with refugees. Some refugees might feel insecure about discussing personal things in the presence of a translator (Varvin, 2003). In order to meet this concern, the translators were asked to sign a promise of secrecy in the presence of the participants. Moreover, the informants were asked if they had any preferences in using a certain translator, and if this was the case, the author tried to obtain the services of that translator. The author contacted and fixed the appointments with the translators. Asker and Bærum State Hospital covered the costs for the translation services. For the rest of the participants, the language used during the interviews was English and Norwegian.

By employing participant observation methods the dynamics of the group and the behavior of those being observed might be altered in some way (Kurz, 1983, in Barker, Pistrang & Elliott, 2002). The author reflected upon this in the design phase of the project, as she planned to start her field- study as soon as the participants started their classes. In this way, the author did not start the participant observation after the group was already formed, and was regarded rather as a fellow- colleague than as an observer.

Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, and each of them signed a consent statement. This was done in the presence of the translators- when this was the case- in order to assure that the participants understood their rights, the purpose of the study was, and how the data were to be used. All information that could disclose the identity of the informants were omitted in this report. The study was conducted in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration on Research Topics.

Reliability and validity

Giles (2002) argues that reliability and validity are central criteria in evaluating qualitative research. In order to ensure the reliability of this study, a detailed documentation of the research process is given- regarding design, implementation, and analysis of data and presentation of results.

One common way in which qualitative researchers assure the validity of their research is through triangulation- the use of a variety of different perspectives on the research questions (Flick, 2006; Kurz, 1983, in Baker et al., 2002). In this study, method triangulation and theoretical triangulation (Tindall, 1994, in Giles, 2002) were employed. A method consisting of participant-observation combined with semi- structured interviews was considered adequate. Moreover the phenomenon of second language acquisition was approached from a number of different theoretical perspectives (Giles, 2002). This was considered useful at the outset of the study, especially since much of previous research has been mainly quantitative and restricted in terms of theoretical and disciplinary focus.

Participants

The aim of the present study was to increase the understanding about Norwegian learning in the context of the adjustment process of a group of refugees, which have participated in the S. project. The number of participants in the study depended on the number of participants in the S. project to the date of data collection (Kvale, 1996). The sample frame included refugees with low progression in learning Norwegian, who participated or had participated in the S. project, conducted by M. Center, in the period from autumn 2006 to spring 2008 (class 1 and 2). A total of 17 refugees, both women and men had taken part in the S. project. With help from the Norwegian teacher working in the project, the author contacted the participants and invited them to participate in the study.

A number of 11 refugees agreed to participate in the present research. Seven participants were still taking part in the S. project. Two took part in the first class, but due to unsatisfactory level of language proficiency continued the course, and two attended the first class. The participants came from Burma (4), Somalia (3), Afghanistan (2), Iraq (1), and Kosovo (1). The participants ranged from 31 to 54 years in age and had lived in Norway for a period between 2 to 10 years.

The sample was homogenous in that all the participants were adults, with limited years of formal education (0-9 years), living in Norway for at least two years. The majority had a low level of proficiency in Norwegian, and had participated in both regular Norwegian classes, and the S. project. Except for one, all participants were married and had children.

Data collection

Data were based on four months of participant- observation and semi- structured interviews conducted with each participant. The field study was performed during September to December 2007, when the author participated in the classes and the social activities organized by the center. In the beginning of the field study, the author was introduced to the students and the personnel involved in the S. project. With help from the Norwegian teacher, the author explained her presence to the students and asked for oral consent. The number of days spent at the center depended on the structure of the course and the activities the participants were engaged in. In the first two months, the author attended to all the classes and activities for approximately four days a week, five hours every day. The rest of the period the informants were placed in different practice places and the field observation was reduced to one or two days a week, when the participants were joining common classes at the center. At the end of the participatory- observation period, the informants were asked to participate in an interview.

The second part of the research consisted of semi- structured interviews conducted with participants from both S. classes. Nine interviews took place at the M. center, which represented a familiar and safe environment. One interview took place at the institution where the participant was working, and one interview was conducted at BKVO. The author conducted eight interviews in Norwegian with translators, two in Norwegian and one in English. Each interview lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Nine interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim, and in two interviews the author took notes, as the participant did not agree to be audio taped. The project was approved by the Board Group at M. center- that has representatives of the Refugee Office in Bærum- and by the Privacy Ombudsman for Research.

Measures

Participant observation

A methodological approach of 'being with' and sharing experiences (Ingold, 1993, in Grønseth, 2006) was considered appropriate as a first part of the study. This was crucial in order to obtain practical information about the aim; and the structure of the course; as well as of the methods employed. During this period, the author also got familiar with the participants. Adult learners of

a second language are active agents (Donato, 2000), who bring their every day experiences into the classroom context (Baynham, 2006). Practical and sometimes urgent issues were brought into the classroom discourse, as the students needed support to resolve different issues related to housing, medical appointments, appointments with the social security contact person, taking free from school as their children were sick, etc. In this way, the author achieved an understanding of participants' everyday experiences and the importance of Norwegian in the process of adjusting to their new lives in Norway.

Flick (2006) presents descriptive and focused observation as the first two phases of participant observation. As the purpose of the present field study was to obtain descriptive observations, which could be developed during the interviews, the researcher tried, in the first phase, to grasp the complexity of the field and to develop more concrete research questions. As time passed, the observations became more focused, as the author narrowed her perspective on problems that appeared relevant for the research questions. The field notes from the participant observation period were used both in the data analysis and in constructing the Interview Guide used in conducting the interviews.

Semi- structured interviews

Interviewed persons are more likely to express their viewpoints in an openly designed interview situation than in a standardized interview or a questionnaire. Further, the interviewees are offered the opportunity to decide how detailed they want to answer or to talk about specific themes, and what information they are disposed to provide (Kvale, 1996; Smith, 1995).

An interview guide was constructed to serve the purpose of this study. For the interview conducted in English, an English version of the interview guide was used. The questionnaire consisted of open- ended questions related to the process of second language learning- in the classroom and in the naturalistic context- and to how participants related language fluency to their lives in Norway. Although the interview questions concentrated on these issues, the interviewer was open to receive any information the participants were willing to provide. If the information was seen as relevant for the study, it was formulated as a question that was used in

the following interviews. The interview guide is inspired by the Private Theory Interview (Christoffersen, 2007).

It was not the purpose of this study to investigate how participants' traumatic experiences- if participants did live with such experiences- influenced the process of language learning. It was considered unethical to provoke participants through conversations about traumatic experiences, since the interviewer was not a trained clinician, and no psychological support could be provided later. Accordingly, no interview questions were formulated on this topic. Still several informants talked about traumatic experiences, in relation to other subjects. The information provided by these participants was included in the results of the study.

Each interview started with a short briefing (Kvale, 1996). The participants were informed about the aim and the practical implications of the study. Informants were also offered explanations about how the interview would proceed and about ethical aspects regarding their involvement. The participants were invited to ask questions, and the researcher provided them with further information if that was the case.

The researcher conducted the interview by following the semi- structured interview guide. Supplementary questions were added to clarify and expand on the points raised. Moreover, when the interviewees brought into discussion subjects not included in the interview guide and relevant for the research, the interviewer followed those themes. At intervals, the interviewer made sure the participants did not have problems understanding the translator and vice versa. In some instances, the translators requested explanations about some questions, as the interviewees faced difficulties in understanding. The author reformulated the questions and provided clarifying explanations. At times, the researcher made propositions and suggestions.

The author conducted the interviews alone. The interviewer had previous experience in conducting interviews, and training was considered unnecessary.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed by means of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative approach that aims to explore in detail participants' personal lived experiences and how participants make sense of that personal experience. IPA is phenomenological in that it wishes to explore an individual's personal perception or account of an event or state as opposed to attempting to produce an objective record of the event or state itself. Although IPA operates at a level that is clearly grounded in the text, it also moves beyond the content to a more interpretative and psychological level (Smith, 2004).

The author transcribed the interviews verbatim and her supervisor heard random examples from each interview in order to check for the accuracy of the transcription. For the interviews that were not audio taped, the author transcribed her notes the same day the interviews were conducted. The transcriptions were read several times until the author got familiar with the content of each interview. While reading the texts, the author made notes and comments on the margins. Subsequently, the author started the open coding (Charmaz, 1995) of each interview, by reading each paragraph and by condensing participants' statements into condensates, and constructing codes, where this was possible. The next step was to read the interview again and try to find emerging themes and sub-themes of relevance for the research questions. The author wrote a condensed version of each interview and structured the texts into overarching themes and sub-themes corresponding to the research questions. The interview was then read again as the author searched the text for details regarding pertinent issues that had emerged. This was done for each interview.

The transcription of the field notes was made the same day, as it was considered relevant to include author's reflections about the respective day, while they were still fresh in mind. The discussions carried out with participants, and relevant statements made by them during classes were coded by using the same analytic approach.

In the next step, all the texts were read in the light of each analytic question and the author analyzed for convergence and divergence regarding the questions, both within each participant's

story and across all the transcripts (Olsen Husebø, 2007). During the analysis, it became obvious how participants' description of one aspect led to other aspects, and so on. It seemed very difficult to separate different aspects. Many participants, for example, talked about how gaining proficiency in Norwegian would increase their chances to find and maintain jobs, which was further linked to being able to support the family and to avoiding family disruption. Therefore, the author considered it meaningful to present the data in a way that would provide a close image of how different themes and sub- themes were linked in participants' stories. Accordingly, when presenting each theme, the author both tried to offer a description of the theme and to show how that theme was related to other themes, as well as to show how these various elements are parts of a larger picture.

The analytical process that followed was grounded in the text, but moved beyond the text to a more interpretative and psychological level (Smith, 2004). The movement from the phenomenological descriptions given by the participants to the more psychologically oriented accounts was accomplished by employing means of interpretations, abstraction, and synthesizing (Malterud, 2002). The author followed Smith's (2004) suggestion to stay grounded and attentive, to constantly check the reading against the transcript itself, and to verify it in the light of the larger text. However, as Malterud (2002) points out, the written material produced by transcription is merely a text and not the reality itself. Transforming oral material into written account, necessarily involves a certain degree of 'distortion' of the original material.

RESULTS

The presentation of the results corresponds to the research questions formulated. The chapter includes participants' descriptions of how Norwegian fluency affects their adjustment and of personal and situational aspects that influence language acquisition. The section also contains informants' descriptions of aspects of the classroom context important for language learning.

Language fluency and adjustment

Making cross- cultural transitions implies that one must become familiar with sometimes totally different systems, values and norms (Hou & Beiser, 2006), as was the case for many participants in this study. Being proficient in Norwegian was described as central in essential domains, such

as: finding and maintaining jobs, being able to solve daily issues and to use societal and health care institutions, gaining knowledge about Norwegian culture and society, maintaining family well-being, and constructing a social network with host conationals.

Informants described how gaining proficiency in Norwegian would enable them to be self-reliable, in line with previous research (Beiser & Hou, 2001; Corvo & Peterson, 2005; Warriner, 2007). They talked about the importance of not depending on others, and explained how Norwegian proficiency was a key resource in order for them to find jobs, to use societal and health care institutions, and to benefit from the education in Norwegian society classes.

Ability to solve daily issues and to use societal and health care institutions

All participants explained that gaining Norwegian proficiency would permit them to handle daily tasks, and to solve practical issues, such as shopping, and reading the mail. The informants described in detail how apparently minor tasks might become a stringent and potentially stressful problem, as one lacked basic skills in Norwegian. One participant illustrated this by an example of purchasing a mobile phone or furniture, and how complicated this process can be:

“For example to buy something, like a self phone, is not the same with buying food. If you buy wrong food, you can throw it and buy new, but when you buy electronically equipment, they are asking you if you want to pay monthly, how much income you have, and this kind of things, and we do not understand anything. To buy a self-phone is not like just paying for it and going home. And when you buy furniture, you cannot just buy it and take it home. Because I do not have a car, and I have to call for a cab, and this kind of things”.

The informants also described how Norwegian fluency would facilitate access to societal and health care services. Some of them explained:

“To go to the social security office, to go to the doctor, you need to know the language”.

“ I can read the papers we get from the social security office. I couldn’t do that before, my husband did it; but now I can do it”.

“If you go to the doctor and you can not speak Norwegian, you can not tell him what is wrong with you. The same if something bad happens, you cannot explain to the doctor what happened”.

One participant described how the fact that she couldn't speak Norwegian restrained her from getting professional help to deal with past experiences. She explained:

"Because I didn't speak the language I always avoided psychologists. I was seeing one, but because I couldn't express myself I stopped. I didn't want to use a translator. I had many things to talk about, but I didn't want others to know it, I didn't want the translator to know it".

Other informants explained how *"everything was new when we came"*, and that communication competence and language skills were central as they needed to *"learn the system and how things works"*. One participant further described that the lack of basic Norwegian skills restricted access to information about the Norwegian society, offered by Norwegian society classes. The informant recounted:

"I didn't know a lot of things, about society in general, about rules and norms. I had to experience them, or asked my colleagues, which explained me that things should be done in one or another way. I could have learned all these things at the course, but because I didn't understand and we did not have a translator I couldn't do it".

Employment

The participants described that learning Norwegian would considerably increase their chances in finding and maintaining jobs. They offered details about how Norwegian skills were imperative in the initial phase of searching for jobs, writing and sending CVs and job applications, and participating in interviews. The informants also talked about how speaking Norwegian was crucial in performing a job, as they needed to communicate to colleagues, and to understand their duties and responsibilities.

Informants described the difficulties they met in writing CVs, and searching for jobs, partly due to insufficient Norwegian skills, and partly due to lack of any knowledge regarding using computers or accessing Internet. Many participants *"used a computer for the first time during S. course"*. Some of them expressed that without the help provided through S. course they would never have been able to acquire the skills required to search to, apply to, and handle a job. One participant formulated it as follows:

"They help you to write a CV, to send job applications, to use a computer. I am very pleased. If I had not been here maybe I would have never been able to find myself a job [...]"

Further, one participant who at the time of the interview was trying to find a job talked about how speaking Norwegian poorly affected her chances during the interviews to obtain the job. She described:

“I have been on job interviews, but because I do not feel comfortable with the Norwegian language and cannot express myself, it might happen that lack of Norwegian proficiency was the reason I didn’t get the job. I feel that I am capable and can carry out a job, but language is a barrier”.

This informant also explained that insufficient Norwegian proficiency did not only considerably decrease her chances in obtaining a job, but also limited the types of jobs she could apply for, and opportunities for further education:

“I was on a job interview not far away from where I live and I really hope that I can get that job. It was an interview at a laundry. And they asked me why I was interested in working at a laundry. I answered that I could not perform an office job because I don’t speak Norwegian. For me, there are three opportunities: laundry, washing, or cafeteria.

Interviewer: But if you could speak Norwegian better, would you like to search for other jobs?

Participant: Yes, I could have found an easier job. I could maybe have taken some courses”.

Talking about their experiences from the practice places, most participants described having difficulties in understanding their work colleagues and feeling “embarrassed” to repeatedly ask for explanations. They recounted that “everybody was very busy”, and that it was difficult to obtain help and explanations every time they needed it. One participant formulated it as follows:

” If you do not manage the language, both written and oral, you can have problems at work. People do not have time to explain you things a thousand times; they tell you once and go. If you understand or not understand, it is your problem.”

Many participants declared that they felt unprepared to work, due to insufficient language skills, and explained how practical experience gained at the practice places made them understand how much they needed to learn Norwegian if they wanted to be able to work:

“Now I feel that I came closer to get employed, and I am worried, and I realize that I should know the language, because I need it very much.”

“I want to work, but I must learn more Norwegian first. I must be cleverer. I do not know enough yet.”

Participants illustrated how lack of language compromises employability, access to services and ultimately self-sufficiency. Employment was in many cases described in terms of financial gains, which in turn, would provide economic stability. Some informants further mentioned that being

unemployed meant, *“living a meaningless life”*. Another informant who is currently working made the following statement:

“I work here, I got this job, but it was not because I was clever, but they liked me very much, they had sympathy for me and felt sorry for me. So it was not due to the fact that I could manage the language, that I was clever”.

This description seems to illustrate the importance of employment regarding one’s self- esteem, in terms of being satisfied with personal achievements and performances.

Intra- familial relationships

All participants that were married and had children related language proficiency to being able to carry out their roles as providers and caregivers. Two participants described how being able to speak Norwegian would give them the possibility to *“help their children”*, without relating it to more specific issues. In these cases learning Norwegian was described as having to do with making a better life for their children in a way that seems primarily symbolic.

Some other participants linked learning Norwegian to more explicit aspects of children’s and family’s well being and described how achieving Norwegian proficiency could enhance their chances to find a job. Gaining financial stability would subsequently enable them to offer a better life for their children. One participant explained how working and having a good financial situation would eventually permit him to purchase a flat, and in this way to ensure that the family would continue living together and maintain its bonds:

“As we live here, it is important for us to get a job. I say this because we rent an apartment now, but I don’t know how long we can live like this. But if you get a stabile job, than you can have the children stay with you all the time. If you get a stabile job and your own apartment, then you feel better in front of your children.”

One participant explained how language skills affected parental authority in child- parent relationships. This person talked about the difficulties he faced after the arrival in Norway in finding educational and disciplinary strategies for his teenage children. He explained that in his home country physical punishment was a socially accepted disciplinary method: *“all the parents are allowed to hit their children if they say something wrong for example. My parents did that and I did that”*. After he moved to Norway, he couldn’t use those disciplinary methods anymore, and due to lack of communication abilities, he could not ask for and receive help in order to find more adequate

child-rearing practices. He saw himself in a position where his parental authority was questioned and described his frustration and pain:

When we came here, suddenly we were not allowed to do that, but the children would not listen to me, and I am not allowed to hit them. When children are teenager, it is very difficult, because they do not want to listen to their parents. The roles had suddenly changed. Before they listened to me, but now they won't do it anymore. It is a very, very difficult situation, very frustrating for me, when my children do not want to listen to their father [...] One time I cried because I said something to my son and he didn't want to listen to me. I cried."

This participant further mentioned that living in a new cultural environment might be challenging for his teenage children, and that they needed parental guidance and protection. He described:

It is very difficult for teenagers, because they do not understand the system, and they think that they do not need to listen to anybody. And they are not mature enough to take care of themselves. They see just the freedom, and that they can do what they want. It is wrong to think like this. At home we were allowed to hit children, but here we are not allowed. But in Norway, if you tell to a three year old that he is not allowed to do something he understands. But teenagers do not understand and it is difficult."

The informant explained that he really needed help in order to find other ways for educating his children and that discussion groups with other parents would be necessary and more than welcome. The participant told:

"I think that it would be very good for me to get some help and to discuss with somebody about these things. This is very difficult for me. I do not know what to do"

Still he missed the communication skills for participating in such dialogues.

Opportunity to construct a social network

Language skills are important as they affect the quality and quantity of intercultural relations (Ward & Kennedy, 1993a). Most of the participants declared that Norwegian fluency would considerably increase their chances to establish contact with natives and to construct a social network. Some of them talked about communication competence as a facilitator of social contact, and subsequent, as a prerequisite of living in a particular social context. One participant formulated it as follows:

"If you live in other country, you have to communicate with other people, it is very important. If you do not manage the language, you can not understand the people around you".

Two other participants described that acquiring Norwegian proficiency would facilitate communication with Norwegians. This would then give them a feeling of belonging to the Norwegian society, and would prevent them from being isolated:

“I like to learn the language and to get known with others. I like to be together with other people, to be surrounded by them, and to integrate myself in the society. I do not want to be isolated and excluded from the society”.

“Everybody speaks Norwegian here, everything is in Norwegian, so if you do not understand the language, then you feel like you are not with the rest, that you miss something”.

Informants also talked about how knowing little Norwegian made it difficult for them to engage in social interactions with native Norwegians. One participant described:

“We were invited to have dinner at some Norwegian families, but we didn’t dare to go because we can not speak the language [...] But I think that if we learn the language we will make friends, like families of our children’s colleagues”.

Likewise, another participant recounted:

“You know, as it is, I worry a bit because I cannot speak well enough and in this way maybe I avoid to have any friendship relationships with Norwegians”.

Similarly another participant described that he perceived making Norwegian friends as difficult, and that this was mainly due to his limited Norwegian skills. Although he spoke Norwegian rather well, and the interview was conducted in Norwegian, he argued that Norwegians often did not understand what he was saying. He explained:

“I think it is difficult to make Norwegian friends. It is for sure because of the language, because I do not speak well enough.”

This informant mentioned that a higher level of Norwegian proficiency would facilitate him to make friends, and illustrated further why making Norwegian friends was important:

“We get this offer from the authorities to go to the Norwegian course, but friendship is not an offer from the authorities. I need to make friends. It is not enough with what we get to know at school, but we have to experiment, to see. I am that kind of person that needs to see with his own eyes how things are. When you learn from a book is one thing, but you have to put it in practice, that is something else. I want to do things myself.”

Moreover, this person explained that having Norwegian friends was important not only as a resource that would facilitate an understanding of the specific of Norwegian life style, but also in order for him to not feel alone, and to have a confident. He explained:

“I feel very lonely. One needs friends; it’s much easier when you have heavy thoughts to share them with a person and to talk together.”

Likewise, some other informant talked about how he and his wife felt alone and missed their families and old friends from home, and declared:

“We feel alone and miss our families and friends very much. I feel like there is emptiness in my heart. [...] we had these surroundings before, and we would like to have the same here, with family- friends and their children”.

Participants explained that acquiring Norwegian proficiency would facilitate interactions with Norwegian nationals. For the participants who had a limited social network of native conationals, making friends was significant in terms of the emotional benefits of having a confident. For others, who mentioned that they had many conationals friends and acquaintances establishing social contact with Norwegians was important as a source of knowledge about specific aspects of the Norwegian societal and cultural aspects.

Determinants of second language acquisition

Personal features

According to the literature, both pre- migration and post- migration aspects might affect language acquisition (Beiser & Hou, 2006). In this study, participants explained why learning Norwegian was difficult, and referred to aspects related both to pre- migration- in form of age and educational background, and post- migration period-attitudes towards Norwegians, investment, and use of Norwegian. Some informants also described that linguistically differences between their native languages and Norwegian and lack of dictionaries made the process even more challenging.

Age

Age at immigration may affect proficiency in the host country’s language (Hou & Beiser, 2006). Most of the participants in this study declared that learning Norwegian was a very hard and time-consuming process. Informants related these challenges to age and explained how being older made it difficult to memorize:

“I am older now, so I do not remember as the young ones, or the children do. It has become difficult to remember”.

“I think it is difficult for me to learn because I am old. My memory is bad and I can not remember.”

“When you are adult, it’s not that easy to learn. Children and the young ones learn much easier. I see that it is much more difficult for me to learn Norwegian than for my children”.

Another participant said she had difficulties in *“keeping information in mind”*:

“I am older now, and I have experienced war. I would say these are the reasons why it’s difficult for me to learn.”

This participant was the only one who described previous traumatic experiences as influencing her learning abilities and subsequent proficiency. Still several other participants depicted experiences related to war and conflict situations. Some informants mentioned they were oppressed in their homelands and were forced to leave. Others recounted that they were pushed out of their country by war and political insecurity. Still others talked about the years spent in refugee camps, where they had experienced insecurity, fear, and lack of opportunities and hope for a better life. The relationship between previous life events and the learning process has not been the focus of this study. Moreover, it is unknown to the author of the present study if the experiences recounted did have any traumatic effect on refugees’ psychological health. However, it was important to include these facts in the results section, as they can provide a better understanding of ‘age’ as a potential determinant of language learning.

Educational background

Further, informants described that learning Norwegian was challenging, as they had limited educational background. One participant recounted:

“I haven’t been studying for a long time, but I try very hard, I read until 12 o’clock in the night, but it is not helping. Everything is gone after a few days, and nothing remains in my head”.

The participants explained that they learned their native languages mostly orally, without focusing on written aspects or grammatical rules. One participant declared:

“I was not very clever in my native language. I could talk, but I didn’t know grammar, or how the language is constructed and this kind of things. I was just talking. I was not very good at school and I have been gone from school for a long time.”

Similarly, two other participants reported that they had no prior formal education, and explained how this fact made the process of learning Norwegian particularly difficult:

“It was extremely difficult for me, because I do not have any educational background. I didn’t go to school before. I had to learn to read and write when I came to Norway.”

“I was analphabet, I couldn’t write or read. When I went to the (standard) Norwegian course, the classes had a high tempo, and I couldn’t follow, it was very tiring.”

Most participants explained that they didn’t use any particular learning strategies when studying at home, and were mainly just trying to do their homework. Some of them mentioned that they tried to listen to CDs and solve exercises. One participant formulated:

“I do not really use any learning strategies. I do my homework, and sometimes I listen to CDs and try to solve exercises.”

Attitudes towards Norwegians and life in Norway

All participants described their lives in Norway in terms of “*being happy*” and “*regaining hope*”. They compared their current lives with what they left behind, in their home countries, intermediary countries, or the refugee camps. Many of them recounted great levels of need deprivation and exposure to stressful demands in the home environment (Ryan et al., 2008). One participant described:

“[...] The hell happened there. They were killing and raping. Family and friends were killed. My brother, my sister, my uncle are lost. Many people were hurt, even me.”

Talking about the period spent in the refugee camp, another informant mentioned:

“It was difficult with food and health. For example if the children were sick, you couldn’t get some more food for them, and you couldn’t offer anything. It was like a prison in a way. At nine a clock we all had to turn off the light and to sleep. We didn’t have any freedom or possibilities to choose”.

Life in Norway generates for many a sense of well-being, as basic needs of security and respect (Maslow, 1970) is covered. The informant cited above explained:

“I was from hell, you know? So when I came somewhere peace, not listening to the voice of the bullets, not seeing the bodies thrown on the way, and just normal...I understood that it was still peace in the world [...] My life is normal now, in peace”.

Another participant told:

“I think that we people, regardless if we are children or grown-ups, we know which place is good for us; unconsciously, and we do not want to go back to the place where we suffered. I miss my family back home, but we cannot go back, because of the insecurity and the political situation. We live a good life here, it is peace, and food and housing are not a problem anymore.”

“Norwegians are nice and good people. I was always treated like a human being in Norway. I was never discriminated.”

The informants explained that they wanted to learn Norwegian because they wanted to settle in Norway:

“Since I am planning to stay here for the rest of my life, I must be with the Norwegian population, and learn the language. It is my future here anyway!”

“I will never leave Norway. I like living here very much, and I want to settle here. That’s why I need to learn the language. ”

Personal investment

For participants in this research, learning the language was little rewarding in term of the progress made. The informants recounted that they were *“really motivated and wanted to learn Norwegian”*, but that studying alone- truly due to limited educational background and lack of learning strategies- was highly demanding and time consuming, and little satisfying:

“I am motivated and I want to learn, but...I do my homework, but there are many things I do not understand. And I use a lot of time to translate some words. It is just too difficult, and sometimes I give up.”

“I try to study at home, but it is very difficult and I use a lot of time. I do not understand a lot of things, and nobody can help me. Sometimes I read for many hours, and do not understand too much [...] Many times I become upset and give up.”

Slow, or lack of any progress, made participants unmotivated. Moreover, the time most of them possess for studying at home is rather limited. With one exception, all participants were married and had children, and they dedicated much of their ‘free time’ to families and different domestic activities. One participant resumed it as follows:

“I have to explain why two years (the person refers to the duration of the Introductory Program) are not enough for me; we use the most part of the day at school, and when we come home we have to clean the house, take care of the

children and spend time together. If I have three hours to read, I actually spent two hours on taking care of everything, and then is one hour left, and that is not enough. So I try to understand most at school because I do not make much progress at home.”

All female participants mentioned that they were inconsistent in frequenting Norwegian classes due to being pregnant or taking care of children. Although they had lived in Norway for many years, the time spent on learning Norwegian- both inside and outside the classroom context- had been rather limited:

“I came to Norway in 2001, and the first year I didn’t go to the Norwegian course. Then I was pregnant, and after that I had to take care of my child. I began language classes only in 2005.”

“During the first year I went to the Norwegian course just two or three times a week, because I had to take care of my daughter. She has experienced war, and had some problems. Also my school program was shorter, from half past eight, to eleven, or twelve.”

Situational features

The use of Norwegian

As already illustrated, participants recounted that acquiring Norwegian fluency would facilitate them to engage in social interactions with Norwegians. Moreover, informants told that practicing the language was important for learning, but that they lacked the social context to do this:

“I do not practice enough. You need to talk a lot if you want to learn Norwegian.”

“I do not have much contact with Norwegians. We do not have any Norwegian friends, and we talk just A. at home. We also watch just A. channels. I work alone, cleaning and washing, and do not speak with anybody at work. I have forgotten a lot of words.”

Some informants told that they tried sometimes to chat with Norwegian, just for practicing the language. They explained that coming in contact with host nationals- in order to practice the language- was difficult:

“Norwegians are people who like to live a private life and to be alone. They do not like to disturb others, and to be disturbed. I think this is why is difficult to get along with them.”

“Norwegians are different, they do not like to chat. You cannot talk to them without a reason. And they do not have enough time: they run to job and back home.”

As a part of the Integration Program, participants are offered language and working training, in form of practice places. These places should provide newcomers with a social context where they could practice and improve their language skills, and gain work experience. Anyway, informants told that they were not very content with this offer, and explained:

“I do not think it was very effective, because I didn’t speak to anyone. I had to ask for everything and it was annoying for others. I worked more than I talked Norwegian. ”

“Everybody was very busy and did not have the time to talk to you. We talked a bit during the breaks, but not more. And many spoke very fast and in dialect and I didn’t understand.”

However, two informants told that they were learning a lot in their practice places. One of them explained:

“I learned Norwegian at my practice place. I worked at an elderly center, and the people living there knew I was learning Norwegian. They talked to me slowly, so that I could understand, and told me to listen to what they were talking about and to ask questions when I didn’t understand.”

Participants talked about different communication situations where they often felt insecure, embarrassed, stressed and afraid to talk. One participant recounted:

“I have been on the interview to get a job, but because I knew I could not answer, and that I did not manage Norwegian well enough, I became so stressed that I forgot even what I knew.”

Another participant described:

“I become very insecure and use wrong words. I say something in the beginning and something completely wrong in the end, and I become very embarrassed and do not dare to continue talking.”

Lack of confidence in one’s capacity to communicate- due partly to actual low level of communication competence, as well as to low beliefs that one can communicate in a second language and feelings of anxiety (Clement et al., 2003)- seemed to obstruct the gains in form of practicing and improving language skills, and subsequent engagement in other communication acts. One informant described:

“Sometimes I try to talk with Norwegians, and I can say easy things, like “Hi!” and “How are you?” But they continue and talk faster and I do not understand, and I do not try again”.

Likewise, other informant mentioned: *“because I know I can’t talk, I avoid talking”.*

Linguistical differences

For some participants the distance between their native languages and Norwegian made the process of learning Norwegian extremely difficult. One informant described:

“My language and Norwegian have completely different structures. There are many sounds we do not have, and it is very difficult for us to pronounce.”

Participants also described how hard it was to study Norwegian, as they lacked the possibility to use an intermediary language, and dictionaries to translate from Norwegian to their native language:

“I want to say that we do not have any dictionary when we begin to learn. We do not know how to say things and we cannot look in the dictionary for that word. We have to translate first to English, and then from English to our native language. It is very difficult for us, because we do not know English well enough. Sometimes you translate so much that it is totally wrong in the end.”

Aspects related to the Norwegian classes

Most participants described learning Norwegian as highly challenging and demanding. Informants mentioned that participation to Norwegian classes was “*the best way to learn*”. They discussed different aspects of the classroom context and explained how these features affected investment and learning outcomes.

Important to feel safe and secure in the class

All participants discussed the importance of being in a classroom where they felt safe and secure in relation to fellow students and to the Norwegian teacher. One informant mentioned:

“If you are shy and afraid in the classroom, you cannot learn anything. It is very important to feel comfortable in the class.”

Many informants explained that they had felt like outsiders in previous language classes, as the level of the class was too advanced, and they were always the “*weak ones*”. They recounted that they often felt “*sad*” and “*stupid*”. Participants talked about how they reflected over what their colleagues thought of them:

“In the class there are many people, some of them learn really fast, and others learn slower. The teachers tries to help those who cannot very much and use more time with them, and the ones who are ‘clever’ might think that the weak ones are very stupid and do not manage to learn”.

For some participants those experiences continued up to one year. These last participants recounted how sometimes they stopped asking for explanations, afraid of “*looking stupid*” or of “*disturbing the others*”. One informant described:

“I did not understand many things, but I didn’t want to ask so much. I did not want to disturb the others in the class.”

Participants also explained that during the S. course they did not feel embarrassed or inferior anymore, as everybody had a similar knowledge level. Having a low level of Norwegian became a common feature of the group, enhancing the feelings of belonging:

“Here we are all the same. No one is cleverer. We learn together and do not feel ashamed of asking.”

During the S. course, through discussions and group games the students were encouraged to communicate and cooperate inside the group and to listen to and respect each other’s opinions. Group games were employed in order to increase group cohesion, and active participation to the classes. One participant told:

“I liked at S. that before we started, we played group games, all the group, inclusive the teacher. This helped us to get better known with each other, and with the teacher, and to not feel shy or afraid during the lessons. Then we were willing to learn, and we began the class.”

The Norwegian teacher and the course leader reassured the students that ‘it is OK to be weak’ and that ‘we are here to learn’. Participants recounted they felt “*like a family*”, and “*more confident and comfortable in the class*”. One informant described:

“I call my colleagues ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’. It is very nice to be here, and I feel very comfortable [...] I feel I got a lot of support here and that here I can learn.”

Similarly, another participant described the S. classes not just as a common learning arena, but also as a space where students were accepted as individuals with different cultures, experiences and needs:

“It is safe to talk together in the group and to be together. Actually we give love to each other, and try to understand different cultures and societies, and this is also safe.”

During the S. course the participants had the opportunity to practice Norwegian, and were encouraged to take risks and to try to talk, even if it was difficult and time consuming. They were explained that it was important to use ‘that little they could’, as a first step and to build further on what they acquired. Some of them became more confident about their speaking abilities, and about engaging in further communication acts:

“Now I am not afraid that I cannot speak and I take initiative and I go and talk to people”.

“When I came here, I couldn’t say one word in Norwegian. But here, with all, colleagues, teachers, and others working at the center, I felt encouraged and I started to speak. Now I speak a lot, with colleagues and also with my neighbors and people I know.”

This last participant further described that the progresses he made increased his confidence in future language acquisition:

“If I continue like this, I think that in six months I will not have any problem with Norwegian; I think everything will be ok.”

Teacher- student relation

All participants mentioned that the relationship with the teacher was decisive for their engagement in learning Norwegian and the later progress. The informants facing greatest difficulties in learning Norwegian, talked most about teacher as a fellow being who understood the hardship of their situation. One participant explained:

“For us it is very important that the teacher is good to us, and understands us, and treats us nice. For us it is more difficult to learn, especially in the beginning. It’s called ‘icebreaking’ in English. After that, things go better, but in the beginning is difficult.”

It seems that for many participants the positive attitudes of the teacher, and her encouragements are crucial to feel comfortable and secure in the class and to engage actively in classroom activities:

“K. is a very, very good teacher. She is a good teacher and a good person, too. All of us are very happy with her. She knows how to get to the point; she knows what we need. Because, you know, if you and your teacher are friends, it is very easy to learn. But if you are shy in the classroom, you can not learn anything.”

“K. is a very special teacher. She is open and she knows what we need and she helps us. We ask when we don’t understand and she explains until we understand. Sometimes she draws, or shows us different objects, or use body language. Other teachers do not explain that much, and just move on with the lesson. But they do not have that much time either.”

Better with small classes

The informants preferred being in a “small class” and explained how this gave them the opportunity to “get more help from the teacher”, and “to collaborate more with the colleagues”. Some participants explained that in larger classes, the teacher’s time was more limited, and had to address all students’ needs, restricting the time allocated to each one in particular. One participant described:

“I like best the group size we had here. We were seven persons and I think this is suitable. I had a group with fifteen people and there were many who asked questions in the same time, and the teacher did not have time to answer all. Now it is a smaller group, so the teacher has time to talk to all, and has more time to each student.”

Furthermore, participants explained that large classrooms were “noisy” and they had difficulties in concentrating. One student told:

“I like it here, because we are few and it is quiet. And when one has a question he could ask the teacher and she could help him, and could explain the rule four times for him, if he needed.”

Use of active learning methods

Talking about previous Norwegian classes, participants described how “sitting for hours and writing” made them feel “very tired”. They “did not understand much of the things discussed in the classroom”, felt “uncomfortable”, and were less engaged in the classroom activities:

“I didn’t like to sit down and write for hours. I became very tired and I got headaches. [...] The course had a high tempo and I didn’t manage to keep up. There were a lot of things I didn’t understand.”

“The teacher was writing a lot on the blackboard, but I didn’t understand and she did not have enough time to explain. I copied in my notebook, but I did not understand. I wasted one year of my life and did not learn anything [...] I missed all hope and I thought I would never learn Norwegian.”

Participants recounted that teaching methods based on dialogue and collaboration encouraged them to take risks and to engage actively in classroom activities:

“Before we were not allowed to talk in the class. We could talk with the teacher, but not with the others. But here we talk all the time, all of us, and with the teacher. We discuss things and ask questions. I like this.”

“I learned Norwegian here, at S. I do not know why I didn’t learn that much before. Maybe because at the other courses I was writing all the time and then left home. I looked at the words and I didn’t know the meaning. [...] But here we are reading, checking, testing, each and everything.”

Talking about the S. course, informants described how playing ‘games’ helped them to concentrate, engage in, and enjoy the learning process. Some participants explained that using different materials- such as pictures and physical objects- and associating new words to be learned with their material correspondents made it easier to memorize:

“If we talked about north, south, east and west, they showed us pictures, they showed us where north was, we went there and looked. I was very happy when we did it; you could see, move, and listen. Everything in the same time [...] I liked S. because they showed us pictures, and explained, and this kind of things.”

“D. - the course leader- for example, sometimes he dances, and jumps, and things like this. He tries to show us what different things mean, and which words we should use. He tries to teach us in an active way. I like it and for me it is much easier to understand and to remember. When you just read, you do not understand that easy.”

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated how a group of adult refugees experienced the process of learning Norwegian both inside and outside the classroom context, and how proficiency in Norwegian affected refugees’ well- being.

The data indicated that for these refugees acquiring Norwegian proficiency is crucial for adjustment in terms of gaining a sense of self- sufficiency and belonging, maintaining family well- being, and establishing contact with Norwegian natives. The results indicate that learning Norwegian is highly challenging, due to aspects prior to and post migration. Aspects prior to migration, such as educational backgrounds and concentration and memorizing capabilities appear to be the main determinants of Norwegian proficiency, at least in an initial phase.

Influencing language acquisition to different degrees are also post- migration determinants in form of one’s beliefs in communication abilities and communication anxiety, attitudes towards host country and host conationals, personal investment, linguistical differences, and use of Norwegian. Finally, the results illustrate that group cohesion, class size, learning strategies, and

the relationship between students and teachers determine how refugees engage in, and benefit from the language classes.

Language fluency seems to be a key resource for refugees' adjustment and to highly facilitate refugees' access to other material and social resources (Hobfoll, 2001). In order to truly understand how refugees experience language learning, it was important to investigate aspects prior to and post migration, as well as the relation between these determinants. The participants indicated that much of the learning process took place in the classroom context and influences one's confidence to use the language in other settings. Accordingly, discussing which aspects of language classes determine language learning was also appropriate. Findings from this study seem to illustrate that if one wants to understand key aspects of refugees' adjustment –such as language acquisition- one must apply a broader range of conceptual tools, which permits taking into consideration several individual and contextual aspects. Employing a wider perspective provides a basis for researchers to go beyond the one- dimensional view of refugees that is often portrayed in the literature- as bearers of symptoms, or coping styles, and to give them a voice (Ryan et al., 2008).

Language fluency and adjustment

Hobfoll (2001) states that one key resource is often linked to other resources. Migrants with a resource pool that contains key resources, such as language proficiency, are in a better position to access a variety of other resources, such as social relationships and employment, and to avoid exposure to stressors caused by being unemployed, or feeling alone and isolated. The present research illustrates how language fluency influences newcomers' chances to find and maintain jobs, and how it affects their ability to gain insight into and use societal and health care institutions. Participants explained that being self- sufficient made their lives meaningful, and assured the well- being of their families.

The individual defines his needs relative to his surroundings. Literacy skills, together with familiarity in using computers and accessing Internet are prerequisites for living in any Western society (Elmeroth, 2003), and subsequently in Norway. Persons with little or no educational background, and persons who come from mainly agrarian economies, as was the case for many

participants in the present study, usually lack these skills (Ryan et al., 2008). When language proficiency is missing, or hard to achieve, acquiring the mentioned abilities is highly challenging. Participants described the difficulties they met in searching for jobs, having job interviews, and handling jobs. They also explained that it was difficult to obtain information about the specifics of the Norwegian society and to use societal and health care institutions. Language skills were depicted as the main determinant of the hardships they faced. Findings from this study are in concordance with results from previous research that language fluency is an important predictor of employability among refugees (Beiser & Hou 2001; Hayfron, 2001; Wooden, 1991).

During the first years after arrival in Norway, sponsorship programs cushion the refugees against financial hardship, making employment less imperative than it otherwise might have been (Ghorashi, 2005; Korac, 2003). Later, however, when support from social programs run out, unemployment might become a threat to mental well-being through a variety of pathways including financial strains, depression, and loss of self-esteem (Beiser & Hou, 2001). Accordingly, refugees who due to a lack of language fluency will remain unemployed might be in great risk of facing psychological problems (Westermeyer, 1989).

Participants described how proficiency in Norwegian affected relationships within their families and limited their chances to engage in meaningful social contact with native Norwegians. The concept of social support- including family, conationals and host national friends- has been viewed as a major resource in the literature on stress and coping and a significant factor in predicting psychological and socio-cultural adjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1993a, b) during cross-cultural transitions (Ward, 2001).

Intrafamilial distress can affect the psychological well being of individual family members. Adults are more likely to encounter problems arising from conflicts between traditional parental roles and broader socio-cultural demands (Ward et al., 2001). The study illustrated that cultural differences in child-rearing practices challenged parental authority and made parents lose, or perceive they would lose status within their families. Lack of language skills- essential to communicate needs and obtain information made it difficult to find coping strategies to adapt to changes inside the family structure brought about by resettlement in a new and substantially

different environment. These findings can be seen as expressions of the crises that migrant families might face, as intercultural and intergenerational differences raise questions about established traditions and norms (Tummala-Narra, 2004). The crises faced are aggravated by the fact that children learn the host country's language more quickly, and through acquiring language fluency adopt new cultural norms faster. This is in line with previous findings illustrating that language learning might pose challenges for immigrant and refugees families (Ng, 2007; Segal & Mayadas, 2005; Tran, 1991).

Participants recounted that Norwegian proficiency would facilitate interactions with native Norwegians. Contact with host nationals was described as a valuable source of information about Norwegian society and culture in addition to emotional benefits from having a confident. Participants mentioned that not having friends often made them feel lonely. Loneliness has been commonly mentioned in the literature as a negative consequence of cross- cultural relocation (Grønseth 2001, 2006; Hauff & Vaglum, 1997; Keyes & Kane, 2004). Hauff and Vaglum (1997), for example, found that three years after resettlement in Norway, only 17% of 145 Vietnamese refugees had good contact with Norwegians. Loneliness has been linked to various forms of psychological distress, including global mood disturbance, decrements in life satisfaction and decreased satisfaction with coping ability (Ward, 2001).

The participants described gaining Norwegian fluency as giving a sense of belonging to the Norwegian society and as a tool preventing isolation. These findings are in accordance with results from previous studies conducted in Norway and elsewhere that fluency in the host country's language gives the refugees a sense of belonging to the new environment (Grønseth, 2001, 2006; Keyes & Kane, 2004).

In short, findings from this study indicate that language proficiency indirectly influences refugees' psychological adjustment- as language skills affect employment, access to societal and health care institutions, social contact and family well- being. Nevertheless, language skills exert a direct influence on psychological well- being, being associated by refugees with feelings of belonging to the Norwegian society, and thus, not being isolated. These results are in line with the model proposed by Tran (1987) for the prediction of psychological well- being among

refugees. The model recognizes the importance of a range of moderating and mediating variables, such as language resources, which exert an indirect effect on psychological adjustment.

Determinants of language acquisition

The informants explained that it was hard to learn Norwegian due to age- related causes. Learning was more difficult for adult persons, due to an experienced decrease in memorizing capabilities. One person mentioned previous war experiences as an explanation for the difficulties encountered in learning. More than half part of the participants spontaneously recounted war experiences, racial persecution, or a life in refugee camps. While not being the focus of this study, these findings suggest that future studies should consider traumatic experiences as a factor affecting language acquisition.

Pre- migration experiences influenced post migration aspects important for language learning, such as personal investment, and attitudes towards the host community. Basic psychological needs include a sense of living in a safe and stable environment. For those fleeing persecution or conflict, the possibility to live in a relatively safe society may be of enormous psychological significance and can have a great impact on their life satisfaction in the host society, at least during the first years after the resettlement (Ryan et al., 2008). Furthermore, satisfaction with the new environment is associated with commitment to remaining in the resettlement country, which will reinforce willingness to invest effort in language training (Hou & Beiser, 2006).

All participants recounted that they were very satisfied with their lives in Norway, as they felt safe and respected as human beings. They wanted to settle in Norway, and accordingly, were willing to invest efforts in learning Norwegian. Previous research has documented that positive attitudes towards the host country are positively correlated with motivation in learning and subsequent language proficiency (Gardner, 2000; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). However, results from this study indicate that participants' positive attitudes towards the new environment affect their motivation to learn, but other aspects appear to be more influential for the learning process, and later language acquisition.

Almost all participants recounted that they had limited educational background. Most came from oral cultures, where personal contact is highly valued for teaching. As they came to Norway, they entered a written language culture with books as an important source for learning (Elmeroth, 2003). Literacy in the homeland indicates that tools that can be used to learn another written language are present (Segal & Mayadas, 2005). When a language is already established, concepts and thoughts, together with learning strategies are transferred to the new one being studied (Gardner & Clément, 1991). Participants' limited reading and writing skills in their native languages, and limited experience with formal learning, proved to be constraining their ability to learn Norwegian. The gap to be filled is even bigger for illiterates.

The relationship between language fluency and social contact with natives is a reciprocal one; on one side, language fluency increases one's chances to establish a social network. On the other side, social contact provides a context for newcomers to practice and improve their language skills (Clément, Noels & Deneault, 2001). Informants mentioned that they lacked social contexts where they could practice and improve their Norwegian skills. Participants' descriptions appear to suggest that entering a social context that would offer possibilities to practice the language is not enough. In order to actually benefit from the contact, both the time spent in conversational interactions and the quality of the informational input are important. These descriptions are in line with findings from previous studies, which showed that language learning occurs in collaborative dialogue, where learners are provided with an 'understandable input' (Krashen, 1985), from a more knowledgeable person (Ohta, 2000; Swain, 2000; Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2002).

Krashen (1982) argued that optimal input occurs when the 'affective filter' is low. The affective filter is a screen of emotion that can block language acquisition or learning if it keeps the users from being too self-conscious or too embarrassed to take risks during communicative exchanges. Findings illustrate that the social contexts should provide the learners with emotional support so that engaging in conversations become rewarding and not stressful due to mismatch between the language skills of the partners. Participants described situations where they felt anxious and insecure, as the partners' language skills were too advanced. They talked about their feelings of anxiety in different communication situations, and explained that these feelings and low beliefs in

their communication competence affected later engagement in communication situations. Many informants recounted that during the S. course they became more confident in their Norwegian skills. They explained that this helped them to be more courageous in using their language abilities in other contexts. It appears that for these participants it was important to have a context that encouraged confidence in using the language. These findings are in accordance with results from previous research that documented how one's confidence in using language influence subsequent willingness to use the language and later proficiency (Clément et al., 2003).

Some informants also described that native languages and Norwegian had no similarities, and they lacked dictionaries. Participants explained that the challenges they faced, and low progress made the process of language learning little rewarding. Many of them recounted they often felt unmotivated to reinvest in learning. Furthermore, many participants devoted large amounts of time to their families, and to domestic activities. Accordingly, the time they used for studying was rather limited.

These findings confirm results from previous studies that documented age (Dustmann & Fabri, 2003; Hou & Beiser, 2006; Mesch, 2003), educational background (Dustmann & Fabri, 2003; Elmeroth, 2003; Mesch, 2003), previous traumatic experiences (Everly & Lating, in Allen et al., 2006), and exposure to situations that promote language use (Chiswick & Miller, 2001; Dustmann & Fabri, 2003) as determinants of language acquisition. Researchers often do not consider these aspects together. However, it appears that in this study, pre-migration features influencing Norwegian learning are connected with exposure to social contexts where one can practice the language, and no aspect alone would provide a sufficient description. The biological disadvantage of adults learning a second language does not alone provide a sufficient explanation, and thus age should be understood in relation to other aspects mentioned here.

This group of adult refugees entered the resettlement process with a low level of personal resources important for language learning (Ryan et al., 2008). This fact made the process of language acquisition strongly challenging and time consuming. According to Ryan et al. (2008), psychological stress can arise when there is a demand overload; the individual's resources are overtaxed, or perceived as overtaxed, in relation to the satisfaction of needs or pursuit of goals.

As illustrated, participants seem to lack important resources for learning the language. There is a danger that the learning process itself might cause psychological distress, as the participants feel that they do not possess sufficient supplies to learn Norwegian.

The present research also focused on aspects of the classroom context that encourage informants' active participation during the language learning and influence the degree to which they benefit from these classes. The results are in line with findings from a previous study by Clément and colleagues (1994) and illustrate that the classroom context and extracurricular contact activities might jointly affect language self- confidence.

Group cohesion refers to the strength of the relationship linking the members to one another and to the group itself (Forsyth, 2006) and is related to the evaluation of the learning environment, and, by extension, to lower anxiety and higher self- confidence (Clément et al., 1994). Safe and supportive classroom atmosphere- both in terms of relationships among students and between students and teachers- encourage student involvement and activity while moderating anxiety and promoting self- confidence. The student brings experiences with language in the classroom context to naturalistic contexts of language use, the quantity and quality of which appears to be positively affected.

The teaching methods employed and the size of the class were also described as determinants of language learning. Many participants came from oral societies, where personal contact is highly valued in teaching (Elmeroth, 2003). Furthermore, most informants recounted they had limited school experience, and that previous Norwegian classes were tiring, too advanced, or too little rewarding. Accordingly, attending standard Norwegian classes might have been stressful, as individuals' resources were overtaxed in relation to the demands of the learning activity (Ryan et al., 2008). The use of active teaching methods that encourage dialogue during the classes, and that to a less extent relies on the use of books were truly perceived as more familiar and less demanding. Being in a class with a small number of students would give them the possibility to interact more inside the class, and to be provided with more help and support from the teacher.

Conclusion and implications

This study illustrates that language proficiency is decisive for refugees' psychological adjustment and well-being. It strongly influences one's chances to engage in meaningful activities in the new environment, prevent newcomers from being isolated and facilitates social contact. In order to obtain knowledge about this particular aspect of resettlement, it is important to consider the psychological aspects involved in learning. However, these aspects should be analyzed in relation to the opportunities provided by the new social context.

Learning Norwegian is for most of the participants in the study highly challenging- due to individual and situational aspects, and support in form of Norwegian classes is needed in order to gain language proficiency. When the opportunities provided do not meet newcomers' needs, the learning process might become stressful, due to a mismatch between the resources possessed and the demands of the learning activity (Ryan et al., 2008). Accordingly, Norwegian classes should offer a safe context that would recognize the participants as unique individuals with different personal and cultural histories; would decrease anxiety and would increase one's confidence in his communication skills; and would encourage active participation. This is highly relevant as experiences from the classroom context influence participants' confidence in using the language in other situations.

The identification of groups 'at risk' of lacking proficiency in an official language can provide a basis for designing more effective public policies regarding immigration, language training, and immigrants' social and political integration (Chiswick & Miller, 2001). One must think what is 'realistic' and 'practical' for refugees (McSpadden, 1998, in Warriner, 2007) and design resettlement programs based on receivers' needs and resources. S. course seems to encompass many of these characteristics, and similar offers should be encouraged.

Limitations

The present study has several limitations. The purpose of this research has not been to offer case studies, but to provide a full description of the determinants of language learning, and the role played by language fluency in the adult refugees' adjustment. Thus, the reader might miss the general picture of the facts described for any individual participant. Moreover, as the study has several objectives, it has multiple- focus, including interconnectedness of several themes. Thus,

the analysis is relatively broad, as compared to in- depth analysis regarding singular- focus themes. As previous research on these topics is rare, it was considered imperative that a first study in Norway should offer a descriptive presentation that encompassed the width of the questions involved. This may inform further research into the many questions included.

During the study the author was in permanent contact with the personnel working at the M. center. Participants might have perceived her as closely connected to the people engaged in the S. project. Accordingly, informants might have accentuated some of the difficulties they encountered due to insufficient language skills: such as finding a job, hoping that the author could somehow provide them with help, by influencing the personnel working at the S., or other welfare instances. The ‘multimethod’ approach of the present study may have reduced the influence of this possible problem.

Future research

To date, much of the existing research on language learning in the context of socio- cultural adaptation and psychological well- being have been undertaken on populations of immigrants. Contingencies such as pre- migration trauma that might affect language learning differentiate refugees from immigrants (Hou & Beiser, 2006). Future studies should focus upon the topic of language learning among refugee populations, as it appears to be a key resource for refugees’ psychological adjustment. Results from this study could be used as a point of departure in studies that in more detail- and in other refugee groups- investigate each of the aspects formulated as objectives in the present study.

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APPENDIX A

Intervjuguide

Takk for at du ville være med på dette intervjuet.

Mange flyktninger opplever at det er vanskelig å lære seg et nytt språk. Dette intervjuet er en del av vår undersøkelse om hvordan flyktninger opplever det å lære seg et annet språk og hvilken betydning kunnskap i Norsk har for deres liv i Norge. Jeg er interessert i å få vite litt om deg selv og dine tanker og erfaringer rundt lærings- og integreringsprosessen. Med din hjelp, kan vi finne ut mer om flyktningenes erfaringer generelt. Denne informasjonen kan brukes videre i utvikling av programmer som svarer på flyktningenes egne behov.

For at vi skal kunne forstå hverandre godt, skal tolk oversette for oss. For at jeg skal få med meg alt du sier, blir samtalen tatt opp på lydbånd. Kanskje kommer jeg til å notere litt underveis. Alle som er med på intervjuene har taushetsplikt, og det er ingen andre enn oss som jobber på dette prosjektet som får kjennskap til at det er du som har sagt det du forteller. Når resultatene fra denne undersøkelsen er ferdig vil ingen kunne skjønne at det er du som har sagt det du forteller.

Ingen svar er riktige eller gale, og det er du som bestemmer hva du vil fortelle meg. Det jeg ønsker å få tak i er akkurat dine oppfatninger og erfaringer. Fortell med dine egne ord og på din egen måte. Hvis det er noe du lurer på underveis eller noe du ikke skjønner, vennligst spør.

Vi har ca 2 timer på oss.

1. Kan du fortelle litt om deg selv?

Hvor gammel er du?

Når har du kommet til Norge?

Er du gift? Har du barn?

Har du utdanning og jobberfaring fra hjemlandet?

Hvilke språk snakker du?

2. Hva synes du om å lære deg norsk?

Hvilken betydning har det for deg/for ditt liv i Norge å kunne norsk?

Snakker du norsk ofte?

Hvis ja: Hvor? Med hvem? Snakker du norsk sammen med familien din?

Hvis nei: Hvorfor ikke?

Er det noen aspekter du kan nevne som gjør læringsprosessen enkel versus vanskelig?

Hvor lærer du norsk mest? På norskkurs? Hjemme, gjennom individuelle studier?

Hvor lang tid bruker du på å studere/ jobbe med å lære norsk hjemme?

Hvordan/ hvilke strategier bruker du til å lære norsk?

Hvor lenge har du gått på norskkurs?

Hvilke norskkurs har du tatt?

Hva mener du om S. kurset? Er S. kurset på noen måte forskjellig fra andre kurs du har tatt?

Hvis ja: på hvilken måte?

Kan du nevne noen ting du likte, eller ikke likte på de språkkursene du har tatt?

Hvordan kan språklæringen gjøres bedre?

3. Er det noe annet jeg bør vite for å forstå?

Hvordan synes du dette intervjuet har vært?

Var det noe du synes det var vanskelig å snakke om?

Har du noen spørsmål til meg før vi avslutter?

Takk!

APPENDIX B

Description of S. course

S. project started in august 2006 and was launched by M. center in Bærum- a district on the east side of Norway- in collaboration with the Refugee Office in Bærum (Flyktningskontoret, Bærum), and Bærum Center for Adult Education (BKVO). The project is sponsored by IMDi, and has the purpose to increase participants' benefits of the Introductory Programme by employing new approaches and methods that would facilitate effective and motivational teaching. S. project makes use of participatory learning approaches, which are considered to better meet these participants' needs than ordinary language classes. The project offers training in Norwegian language, and language and work practice (Grung, 2006).

In a first phase, the project focuses on creating a safe context inside the group, which would encourage active participation. Through discussions and game play, participants get better known with each other and with the course leaders- the Norwegian teacher and the project's leader- and become more confident to express learning needs and to ask for help. Teaching is largely based on dialogue and collaboration between teacher and students and among students inside the group. These are possible to be accomplished due to limited class sizes- approximately seven persons in each of the two classes that have participated to the project to this date. Through individual discussions, the course leader tries to find working and language practice places for each participant. These practice places can be schools, kindergartens, food shops, gas stations, etc. Participants work three days a week in order to practice and improve their Norwegian and gain working experience. The Norwegian teacher visits each participant and provides Norwegian guidance related to that particular working place. One day a week, participants attend Norwegian classes at BKVO, and one day, the group meets and discusses experiences from practice places, and has social activities. Norwegian is the only language spoken in the class, which makes that participants learn the language in an active way during all these activities (Grung, 2006).